

Bill# 59 – Retail Wine Sellers and Wine Related Classes

Written Testimony by Gregory Nemergut, Owner, West Side Wines and Spirits, West Hartford, CT

The model of a liquor store (off-premise or package store permittee) is progressively changing and is becoming more diverse. This change is being largely driven by consumer trends in wine, both nationally and locally, in the form of demand for higher quality and more varied types of wine. The U.S. wine market has grown for 14 consecutive years increasing 66% by volume from 1993 to 2007. Furthermore, wine has a strong positive image with consumers and many positive reports on moderate wine consumption and health contribute to this favorable image. (Wine Institute; Jon Fredrikson, Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates, 2008) A nationwide Harris Poll conducted in December 2008 finds that “almost 6 in 10 Americans (58%) are wine buyers.” (Harris Interactive, 2/09).

Package store permittees, most of whom are individually-owned small businesses, need to be able to develop business strategies and initiatives to respond to these trends in consumer demand and be competitive in a larger market. A large part of this response entails business model fundamentals: investing in a knowledgeable wine staff, creating an inviting environment in which to shop, and selecting and stocking a wide range of wines to offer. Another key part of this response is consumer education. Because of the wide range of wine regions, types and styles, as well as Mother Nature’s impact from year to year, education becomes an important part of understanding and navigating the diverse landscape of the wine world. Only so much information can be imparted at the time of sale and therefore a more comprehensive level can only be gained through structured wine education. Currently we provide a limited and informal level of wine information and education at our in-store tastings. (Exhibit 1) Even so, and most importantly, it is customers who are asking for more structured wine education. At West Side Wines & Spirits, it is the number one request from our customer base and is supported by the fact that 74% of the 1,838 people who have signed up for our wine newsletter indicate interest in formal wine education.(Exhibit 2)

Because of this consumer-driven demand, and from conversations with wine retailers from Fairfield County to New London County, we strongly urge the committee to recommend adding fee-based wine education to an off-premise liquor permit. I envision that this wine education would be provided through formal, structured classes. A class would be defined as a period of instruction to provide education in the origins, history, culture, technical aspects and critical appreciation of wine led by store staff, a trade expert or winemaker. Instruction would involve a verbal presentation, which could include visual media and supporting handouts and other class materials, as well as wine tasting in support of the educational objectives of the class.(Exhibit 3) The supporting wine tasting would be conducted under guidelines and requirements similar to those already in place for “in-store” wine tastings, i.e., the number of wines being tasted and the amount of wine poured for tasting purposes are limited. The class structure and purpose would also be also similar to wine education that has been offered by adult/continuing education programs in various towns throughout Connecticut. The duration of the class would be dependent upon the topic being presented, yet any given class would generally last from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Some topics would warrant more than a single class. Classes would be conducted during established business hours and would not require any extension of opening. Class fees would depend on the duration of instruction, i.e. a single session class versus a multiple session class. Just as fees for cooking classes for the public vary so would fees for wine education. Finally, the fee charged is reimbursement for the investment in developing and organizing the class, the instructional materials (handouts and other supporting literature) provided and wines tasted, as well as to qualify the level of interest of those people taking the class.

In closing, allowing off-premise permittees to provide fee-based education to customers not only responds to consumer-driven interest and demand in a structured and regulated manner, it also fosters a smarter, more aware wine consumer. I believe that wine education through small businesses that are committed to and closest to their customers and the wines they offer is, and should be, a key initiative in promoting the enlightened, moderate and responsible consumption of wine as part of a larger, healthful lifestyle.



Exhibit 1

Join us for Saturday afternoon wine tastings, 2 to 6:30 p.m.

This Saturday, February 14

Sparkling

Lucien Albrecht Crémant d'Alsace Brut Rosé

Crémant d'Alsace is probably France's most traditional yet least known quality sparkling wine. Made by the Champagne method, it is traditionally a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. Dry with fine bubbles, it has full flavors, a light texture and a beautiful onion skin/salmon color. In the rosé version, the grape is only Pinot Noir and the result is a sparkler with a delicate thread of berry fruit. These are simply scrumptious bubbles.

Reg. \$19.99 Special \$17.99

White

Stefano Massone Gavi, "Masera", 2007

While the Piedmont is best known for its long-lived reds, Barolo and Barbaresco, Gavi is its ethereal and delicate white. Made from 100% Cortese from a single vineyard, this delicious white is both soft and crisp. With a pleasant minerality, this straw-yellow wine features notes of apple and pear and a lovely, lingering, refreshing finish.

Reg. \$14.99 Special \$13.49

Reds

Cairnbrae Pinot Noir, Marlborough, 2007

Just as New Zealand has rearranged the world map of Sauvignon Blanc, this land of pristine air and water is making waves with Pinot Noir. New Zealand is evolving its own style of Pinot Noir that's neither the black-cherry-cola-spice of California nor the taut, earthy, precise style of Burgundy. Marlborough is a large winegrowing area to say the least and Cairnbrae, a family-owned and -operated winery, is located in the Rapaura district with neighbors such as Cloudy Bay and Stoneleigh. Welcome to the Kiwi style.

Reg. \$16.99 Special \$15.29

Dashe Zinfandel, "l'Enfant Terrible," 2007

It wouldn't be a stretch to translate the French as "the wild child" and, boy, is this kid fun. This is a wine unlike any other that Dashe Cellars has ever produced: Complex, lower in alcohol, unfinned and unfiltered, fermented using native yeasts found on the grapes, organically grown and harvested early at a comparatively low sugar level for Zinfandel. Mike Dashe purchased all of the fruit from Guinness McFadden's hillside Zinfandel vineyard in Potter Valley (Mendocino County). Dashe's objective was to make a Zin that is not only food friendly, but virtually "hands-off" in the winery. He wanted to keep the fruit as pure and distinctive as possible, reflecting the character of the vineyard. To help achieve this, Dashe fermented in a stainless steel tank and intentionally kept this wine away from heavy oak influences by aging in a huge 900 gallon oak cask to keep the fresh fruit while still possessing a "barrel-aged" character. Compared to the high-alcohol bruisers being made, this "wild child" of Zin is as sprightly and unaffected as you'll ever find.

Reg. \$26.99 Special \$23.99

Special pricing applies the day of the tasting only

10 Raymond Road, West Hartford, 860-233-1241, staff@westsidewines.com

Exhibit 2

Yes, I am interested in receiving a newsletter and announcements about special events, tastings, wine classes and wine dinners.

Name:

Address:

Phone:

E-Mail:

(Please print legibly)

Special Interests?

- ☐ Wine Classes
☐ Wine Dinners
☐ Custom Tastings
☐ Gift Registry

- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

California Cabs
Spanish Reds
Pinot Noir
Australian Shiraz

- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Italian Reds
Chardonnay
Single Malt Scotch
Other _____

Wine 101: Intro to Wine and Wine Tasting

Week 1- Basic components of wine (FASTA)

White Wine Basics

2- Red Wine Basics

3- Sparkling Wine Basics

Dessert and Fortified Wine Basics

Week 1

Basic components of wine (FASTA):

Fruit

Acid

Sweetness

Tannins

Alcohol

How to taste-the 3 steps

Sight

Smell

Taste

White Wine Basics

Key White Wine Varieties:

Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling (or Pinot Gris)

Varietal Information:

Growing regions, varietal characteristics, vinification methods

Tasting:

Sauvignon Blanc- Loire, New Zealand, Bordeaux blanc

Riesling- Germany (Mosel), Alsace, US/Australia

Chardonnay- Burgundy, US, Argentina

Pinot Gris- Italy, Alsace, Oregon

Week 2

Red Wine Basics

Key Red Wine Varieties:

Cabernet Sauvignon- California, Bordeaux, South America

Merlot- California, Bordeaux, South America

Pinot Noir- California, Oregon, Burgundy

Syrah- Rhone, Australia

Week 3 Sparkling Wine Basics

What is Sparkling Wine? How is it made?

- the difference between sparkling wine and Champagne
- production methods
- brut, extra dry, demi-sec

Key types: Champagne
 Prosecco

Sparkling Wine and Food

Dessert and Fortified Wines

Dessert Wines- late harvest, botrytis cinerea, key regions
 Taste: sauternes

Fortified Wines- definitions, regions, methods

 Port- types, taste (tawny 10/20, vintage character, LBV).